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SUBJECT: IRAQ ELECTIONS: LIGHT TURNOUT ON FIRST DAY OF IRAQ

OCV IN JORDAN

Ref: AMMAN 9513

LIGHT FIRST DAY TURNOUT

11. (SBU) Voter turnout was generally light on December 13, the first of three days of Iraqi election Out-of-Country Voting (OCV) in Jordan. Amman-based Independent Election Commission of Iraq (IECI) OCV chief Hamdia al-Husseini told Emboff that less than 3,000 Iraqis had voted countrywide as of 3:00PM on December 13. However, she noted that the polls will remain open until 8:00PM, and predicted that a significant surge in voting will occur after voters get off work.

SMOOTH OPERATIONS, MANY OBSERVERS

12. (SBU) During the course of the day, Embassy Amman election observer teams visited all thirteen OCV polling sites in Jordan, consisting of ten in Amman and one each in the cities of Zarqa and Irbid and at the Jordan-Iraq Police Training Center (JIPTC). Embassy observers found polling operations proceeding smoothly, professionally, and without incident, in an overall atmosphere that ranged from business-like to celebratory. Embassy teams also noted the presence at polling stations of other international observers, including many from the International Mission for Iraqi Elections (IMIE).

13. (SBU) A large number of Iraqi political party observers from across the spectrum were also noted; Allawi Coalition Amman campaign chief Jaffar al-Taie told us that the Allawi campaign would position observers at all polling sites from opening until closing. International press was observed at some polling stations in Amman, including CNN, BBC, Japanese press, and even a correspondent from Mother Jones magazine. An Al-Iraqiyya TV crew was also in action.

SINGING AND COOKIES

14. (U) Polling sites near areas inhabited by wealthy and middle class Iraqis, such as the relatively upscale neighborhoods of Rabia and Sweifeyeh, appeared to have attracted the largest turnout by midday. By contrast, OCV polling stations in Zarqa and Irbid each had received less than 100 voters by 1PM. Observers at some of the better-attended voting stations noted an almost jovial atmosphere, with occasional bursts of singing and the passing around of candy and cookies at one OCV location. Voting at JIPTC was the most organized, as individual groups of cadet voters arrived to vote at pre-assigned times.

SECURITY MEASURES

15. (SBU) Perimeter security provided by the Jordanian police was uniformly excellent. One or more blocks adjacent to each polling station (frequently an elementary school) were closed off, and a heavy and watchful security presence, some armed, was noticeable. The inner ring of security, provided by a commercial security company, was more erratic - in some cases, Amman observers experienced two frisks plus a metal detector check, while in others there was only one or two frisks, with no metal detector.

Hale